

CHAPTER 3

THE PROGRESS OF REFORM

THE Crimean War had been won. Peace was signed in Paris on March 30th, 1856, but Miss Nightingale remained at her post in Scutari until the beginning of July, though many of her nurses were now able to go home.

The name of Florence Nightingale was by this time a household word throughout the world, and particularly in her own country. Even before the end of the war a movement had been set on foot to recognize her achievement in some substantial way, and a 'Nightingale Fund' was inaugurated.

Needless to say the prospective *bénéficiaire*, upon hearing the news in Scutari, immediately announced that she would accept nothing whatever for herself either in cash or kind, but intimated that if such a tribute was contemplated she would devote every penny raised to the foundation of a permanent Training School for Nurses.

Her scheme was acclaimed, and money began to flow in from all quarters. Madame Jenny Lind, the famous 'Swedish Nightingale', gave a concert in its aid which realized £2,000. The soldiers in the Crimea contributed no less than £9,000. This the Other Ranks were the better enabled to do from the fact that one of Miss Nightingale's non-nursing activities had been to persuade men not to squander their pay, but to bank it or send it home. To that end a Money Order Office had actually been established in Scutari, in which, to the surprise of their officers, most of whom had not hitherto regarded the common soldier as an economist, something like £1,000 was deposited every month.

Upon the completion of her labours in Scutari and the Crimea

—she had paid two other strenuous visits to the latter since her illness—the British Government offered Miss Nightingale the use of a man-of-war to bring her home. This honour she declined.

Once back in England, official honours were showered upon her. She received the thanks of Parliament, and Queen Victoria bestowed upon her a jewelled medal specially designed by the Prince Consort. Women in those days were ineligible for Royal Orders or decorations: otherwise Miss Nightingale would probably have been awarded something in the nature of the Order of Merit. In point of fact, when that Order was created in 1907, she was the first woman, in her extreme old age, to receive it.

II

So ends the saga of the Lady of the Lamp and the miracle of Scutari. But Florence Nightingale was very far from regarding her task as ended: in her view it was only beginning, for she was determined never to rest until the living conditions of the soldier had been raised to a decent level, and his general health and happiness as solicitously assured in peace-time as his wounds had been tended in time of war.

Consequently we shall find that in the continuous record of Army Reform which marked the latter half of the nineteenth century the names of Florence Nightingale (and needless to say, of Sidney Herbert) still stand out conspicuously.

The two allies began directly after the war, by demanding a Royal Commission to investigate the conduct of the Army Medical Services in the Crimea. Miss Nightingale was not of course a member of the Commission, but its personnel was very much of her choosing. Indeed it was hinted, with some truth, that she and Sidney Herbert had 'packed' it—in the public interest. Indeed, it contained only one upholder of the old regime, one Dr. Andrew Smith.

Thanks to Sidney Herbert's vigorous and inspiring chairmanship, the Commission issued its report within three months. It was mainly the work of three hands—Sidney Herbert, Florence

Nightingale, and Dr. John Sutherland. Sutherland had been head of a Sanitary Commission which had been sent out to the Crimea on the urgent representations of Miss Nightingale and her friends in 1855. Thereafter he and Miss Nightingale had become firm and lasting associates in all matters connected with Army health.

III

One by one, and not without many a hard struggle, the suggested reforms were put into effect. Their fundamental soundness was vindicated in due course by a steady improvement in the health, happiness, and general morale of the Army through the years that followed.

New hospitals were planned throughout the country and overseas. Hitherto the only important military hospital in England had been Fort Pitt, at Chatham, erected for the reception of sick and wounded from the Crimea, and where, incidentally, some women nurses had been employed under Lady Jane Shaw Stewart. Now, in 1856, Queen Victoria laid the foundation stone of the great military hospital at Netley, on Southampton Water.

The design and equipment of this building had been a matter of acute controversy. Miss Nightingale's party strongly favoured the idea of a hospital composed of separate 'pavilions', set parallel to one another and linked up by covered passages, thus ensuring a maximum of light and ventilation to the wards, besides minimizing the risks of infection. Lord Panmure, however, Secretary of State for War, insisted upon the retention of the orthodox 'corridor' type, and countered Miss Nightingale's urgent representations by announcing that the foundations of the building had already been laid, and could not be interfered with now. Miss Nightingale appealed to the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, and a few minor concessions were granted; but on the whole the new hospital conformed to the old pattern, and Miss Nightingale had for once to acknowledge defeat. But the battle had not been fought altogether in vain, for practically all great modern hospitals today are designed on the 'pavilion' plan.

St. Thomas's Hospital in London, which faces the Houses of Parliament across the Thames, is an outstanding example.

All during these years new military hospitals were springing up throughout the country—at Gosport, Devonport, Dover, Shorncliffe, Dublin, the Curragh, Canterbury, Cork; and overseas at Gibraltar and Malta. The result was an ever-increasing demand for trained Nursing Sisters. The education of these had originally been carried out at Netley by the Lady Superintendent there, who had herself been trained in the Nurses' Training School founded by Florence Nightingale; but under the expanded scheme this duty had grown beyond the control of a single individual, and it was decided that henceforth nurses destined for Army service must receive their initial training in civil hospitals.

An estimate of the extent of this increase may be gathered from the fact that by 1899 (and the outbreak of the South African War) the regular establishment at Netley alone had grown to one Lady Superintendent, nineteen Superintendent Sisters, and sixty-eight Sisters.

IV

Conditions in the Army continued steadily to improve. Concurrently with the new hospitals, new barracks were in course of construction, equipped with domestic and cooking arrangements more in accordance with a woman's point of view. Such unheard-of luxuries as reading- and recreation-rooms made a modest appearance.

In addition to these improved amenities (most of them resulting from the recommendations of the Royal Commission) we may note the establishment of an Army Medical School for the education of young Army surgeons, many of whom in former times had come to their duties with little more experience than that of looking on at operations—some had never even dressed a wound—and the setting up of a School of Cookery at Aldershot. In this Miss Nightingale received valuable aid from her old ally, M. Soyer. His sudden death in 1858 was a great grief to her.

But the outstanding triumph of the reform campaign was

represented by the fact that, while in 1857 the annual rate of Army mortality in peace-time alone was 17.5 per thousand, it had fallen by 1911 to 2.5 per thousand, or only one death in four hundred men.

Sidney Herbert himself became Secretary of State for War in 1859, and proved a tower of strength to the reformers. But like Miss Nightingale, he habitually overtaxed his strength. His death in 1860 was a shattering blow to Florence Nightingale, and for a while prostrated her. But she rallied in time, and resumed her former activities. After the Indian Mutiny she was invited, and immediately agreed, to do for the Army in India, especially with regard to sanitation and hospital management, what she had already done for the Army at home. Here she had the warm and loyal co-operation of Sir John Lawrence, afterwards Viceroy of India.

v

Miss Nightingale continued to be employed by the War Office as a general consultant on Army Welfare until 1872, when the connexion finally terminated. She was then fifty-two years old, some twenty of which years had been devoted without a break to the service of the British soldier.

Today, in Waterloo Place, London, looking out over the Duke of York's Steps to the Horse Guards' Parade beyond, she and Sidney Herbert stand side by side at the foot of the Guards' Crimea Memorial. To the right and left of them a never-ending procession of motor-traffic, much of it as scarlet-clad as the soldiers of a former day, goes surging up the long slope on its way to Piccadilly Circus. Those two eminently Victorian figures stand strangely aloof and serene in that roaring tide. Florence wears her hospital dress—crinoline and nurse's cap. In her hand she carries The Lamp, and her eyes are cast downward, as if surveying a long line of hospital beds.